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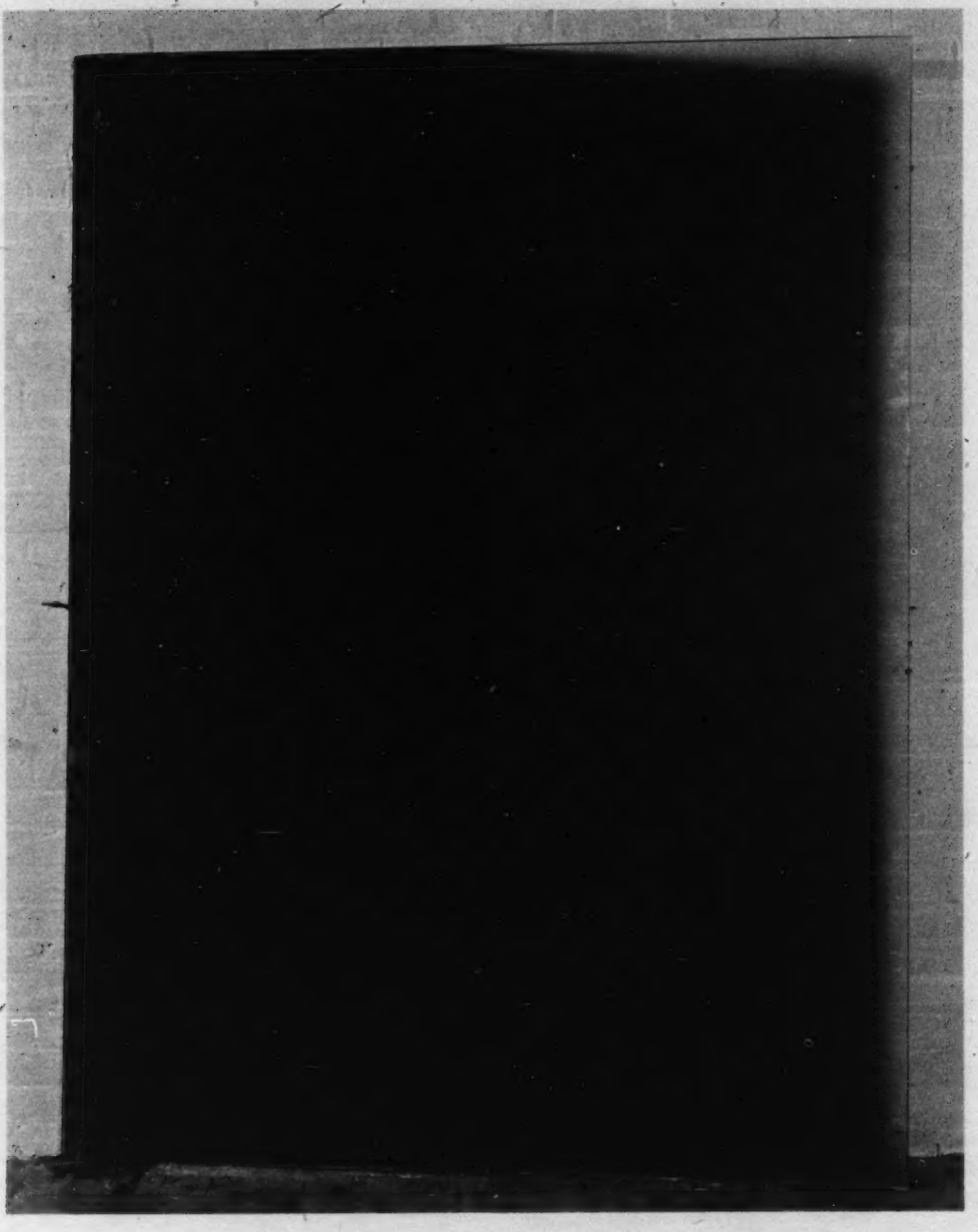
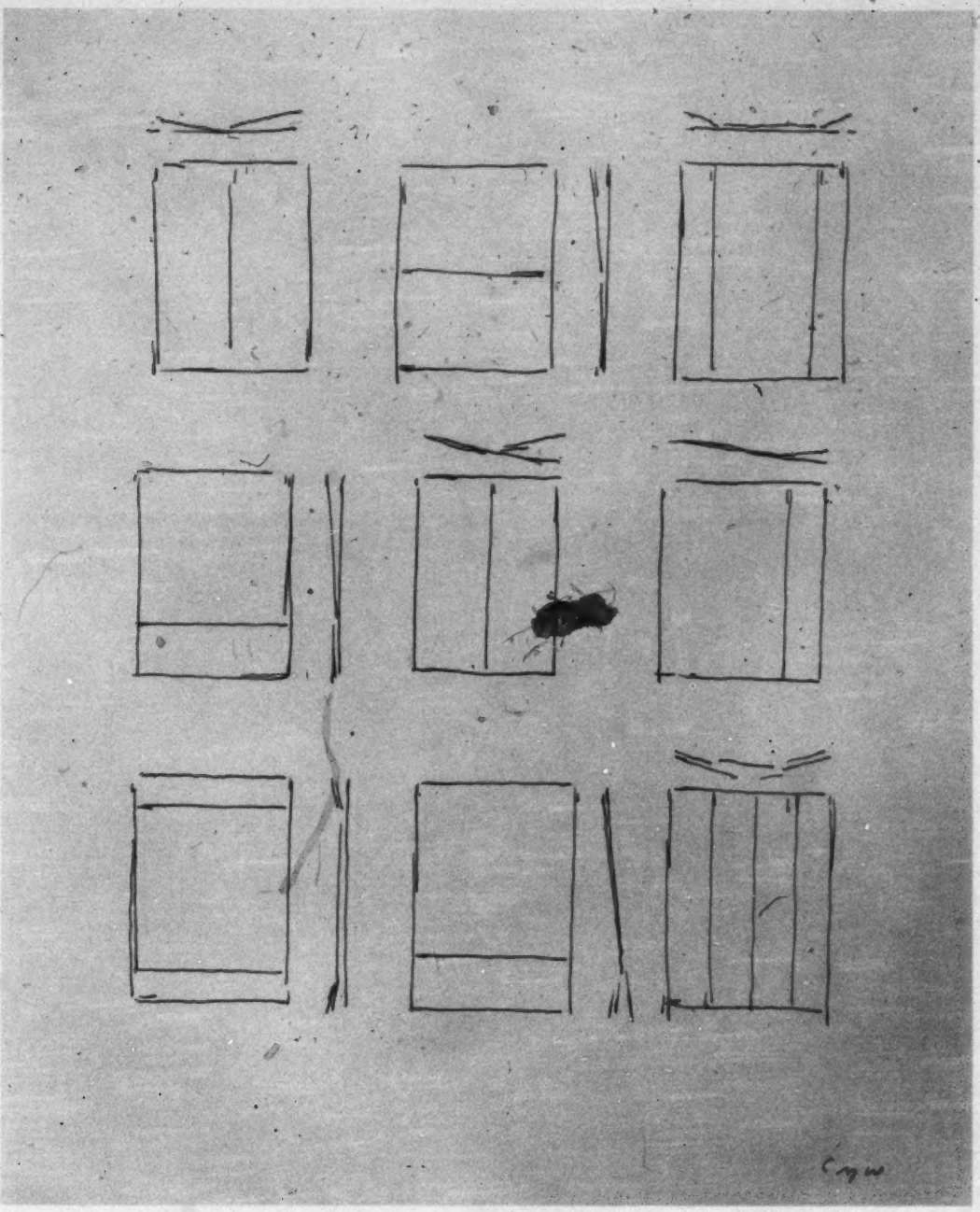
General

78.H HARTFORD U.S.A. Wadsworth Atheneum

Christopher Wilmarth Nine Clearings for a Standing Man





Cover: *Clearing for a Standing Man #5*

Preceding page: *Nine Clearings for a Standing Man*, sketch page

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Christopher Wilmarth

Nine Clearings for a Standing Man

An exhibition organized by the
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut
13 November 1974-12 January 1975

And also seen at
The St. Louis Art Museum
6 February-20 March 1975

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sketch page, is by Eric Pollitzer.

For Susan, on the bridge.

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Preface

Nine Clearings for a Standing Man by Chris Wilmarth is the culmination of a long period in his work. Although not a large exhibition in terms of objects, this group of sculptures embodies in one series an aesthetic belief which he has held for ten or twelve years. It epitomizes much of what many believe to be his best work to date.

I have admired Chris's abilities ever since knowing his early work in California. Like few artists today he has the ability to make simple but profound statements quietly. He has the ability to transform materials which are massive and heavy into apparent weightlessness by the use of light; to make small pieces with enormous scale, or large pieces with a scale that is grand but not overbearing. Above all he has a sense of proportion, whether in large sculptures or small watercolors, which is right. Ultimately these go together to produce sculpture which is poetic and humanistic.

The acknowledgments which customarily appear in a Preface must in this instance begin with Chris himself who has been totally supportive of our conception of the exhibition. We are also grateful to Joseph Masheck for writing the essay which follows. The St. Louis Museum is participating in the exhibition schedule. Finally, Peter Marlow, our Chief Curator, has been responsible for coordinating the preparations for the Atheneum.

Lenders to the exhibition include Henry Geldzahler, New York, and Dr. and Mrs. Edward Okun, St. Louis. All other works are the property of the artist.

We are extremely pleased to be presenting *Nine Clearings for a Standing Man*. We in no way intend it to be definitive, but rather one important stage of an artist's career. We are sure that a great deal more will be forthcoming in future years.

James Elliott, Director

Wilmarth's New Reliefs

by Joseph Masheck

For several years Christopher Wilmarth has used glass, steel, and wire to make variously scaled sculptures of several different but related types, from small wall pieces that approach painting in format to more radically space-encompassing hanging reliefs, and from modestly sized floor pieces to large and complex freestanding constructions. This new group of reliefs, *Nine Clearings for a Standing Man* (1973), continues his involvement with the same materials and ideas in a new way. The concept of sculpture that both rests on the floor and is at the same time attached to the wall, for example, had already emerged in earlier, smaller works. What is remarkable about the *Nine Clearings* is that, despite the large size and emphatically planar surface area of each of the nine pieces, and even though they protrude relatively slightly from the wall and hang as a set of related, facade-like planes against it, nevertheless they are highly — rather severely — sculptural.

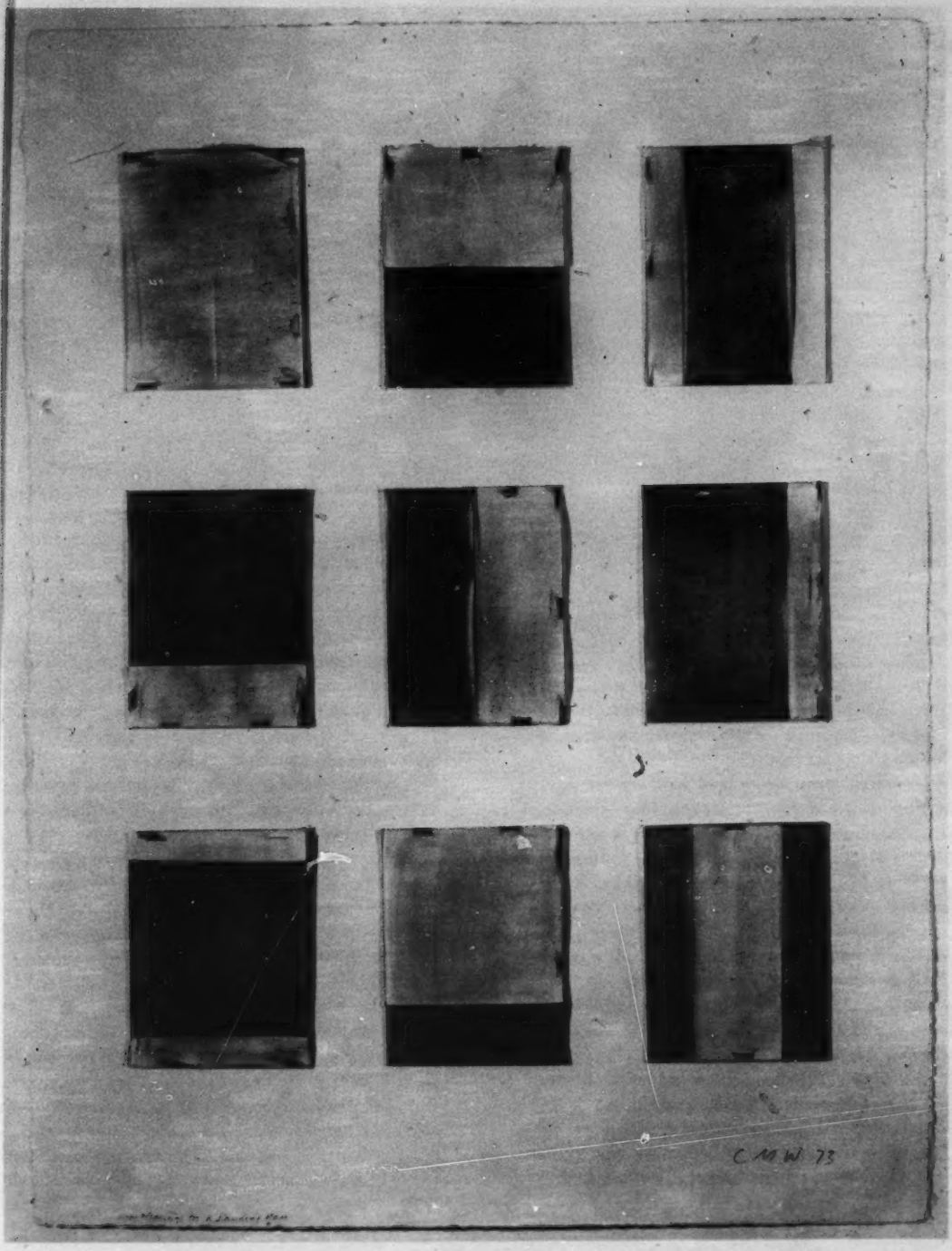
As in other recent sculptures by Wilmarth on a smaller scale, the steel and glass plates which comprise the new works are held fast to the wall by strong cables of wire rope. This makes for a certain tension, especially since these materials are so visibly heavy: gravitational force is held smartly in check, as though the panels were tight by stays on shipboard. Even the fact that the wires function both as structural features and also as *drawn*, linear form, suggests "line" in the sense of naval rigging. Similarly, the tautly strong structural delicacy of these constructions may evoke the suspension bridge.[1]

Fastened close to the wall and, but for their shallow slants into space, parallel to it, the *Nine Clearings* evidence a logical sequence of plane surfaces that is altogether appropriate to the relief situation. Glass overlays steel with a kind of surface tension that points up the insistent materiality of both palpably thick plates. There is an almost electrolytic closeness between the glass and steel, not shared with the neutral wall behind or the unmanipulated space in front, which locates the substance of the sculpture in their relation — however unvolumetric and shallow that might seem.

The wire rope which Wilmarth uses to stay his glass and steel plates together against the wall has intrinsic interest. Wire rope was invented by John A. Roebling, the designer of the Brooklyn Bridge and a man after whom Wilmarth has named at least one work. Appropriately for Wilmarth, the product relates to iron as ordinary hemp rope relates to wood, as Roebling himself observed in regard to contemporary naval architecture.[2] Still another implication is that all three of Wilmarth's materials share a character of technical sophistication, steel being a development from iron, wire rope from hemp rope, and even glass, ultimately, from glazes.

The nine new reliefs are permutatively related, although they do not form a closed system. All have the same oblong vertical format, and the wire ropes bisect them in the same rectilinear way. The group is not rigidly systematic because, while the bending back of an upper or lower half in one unit may suggest the bending back of the top or bottom of another unit, there is no implication that all possibilities need be realized. The choice seems intuitive, which keeps the industrial, megalomaniacal potential of such a system in check.

A small study for each work in the group can be found on a single sheet also entitled *Nine Clearings for a Standing Man*, dated 1973. This sheet serves as a key to the identifying numbers of the individual pieces, reading left to right along the three registers (although the artist finally preferred in the installation to arrange the sculptures in these three sequences of three: 9, 1, 4; 5, 3, 2; 6, 7, 8). This nine-fold drawing, each unit of which consists of sheets of translucent paper with graphite, stapled together, shows that the scheme is not rigid or automatic. Some of the patterns recur in similar variants with dark and light reversed, but some do not. In only one case (*Clearing 1*) does the steel bend back entirely, left and right of center, touching the glass only as a line and leaving it a uniform surface unmodified by tonal contrast. In two cases (*Clearings 2* and *5*) the panel splits into dark and light halves — one with a horizontal fold, the other with a vertical one. In three cases (*Clearings 3*, *7*, and *9*) the panel is divided into three alternating light-and-dark areas. If the same progression continued *Clearing 4* would be one of four similar works of yet a different type (making ten rather than nine units): but even though *Clearings 4* and *8* are reciprocal, the only possible grouping of four executed units would be on grounds of a horizontal subdivision, which is not a categorical enough distinction.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For Roebling, 1973, steel and glass

Wilmarth's fascination with John Roebling is apparent in the very title of a medium-sized glass and steel wall sculpture of 1973 called *For Roebling*, together with a related drawing with the same dedication. *For Roebling* leads distinctly into the *Nine Clearings for a Standing Man* because of its distinct compositional similarity to *Clearing 7*. In the earlier piece a 40-inch square of glass hangs against a steel plate of the same size, propped out three inches from the wall by the bending back of the upper and lower fourths of the square of steel. A single wire fully supports *For Roebling* from a peg in the wall, and where this wire crosses in front of the glass — from the upper fold in the steel to the lower fold — it divides the wider horizontal band in the middle into two squares.

In *Clearing 7* the equivalent flush central area is more than twice as wide as the top and bottom bands, so that the bisecting wire does not define two squares on the glass face, although when this whole configuration is rotated 90° in *Clearing 3*, squares — instead of oblongs — do form. In between *For Roebling* and *Clearing 7* an intervening watercolor drawing experiments with two vertical wires instead of one, which further stresses the derivation of the executed *Clearing 3* in its return to *For Roebling*.

Wilmarth's drawings on translucent paper stand in remarkably close relation to the finished sculptures. What I have already described about similar studies for smaller recent pieces also extends to the drawings for the *Nine Clearings:*

Drawn in heavy, silvery opalescent graphite on multiple layers of translucent paper, they approximate even the allusive physical properties of the finished sculptures. With uncanny aptness, what the real wires are to the hanging reliefs — graphic line and literal support — staples are to these small drawings, in their mechanical frankness as well as in their responsibility to the design. The staples thus read as small dashlike notations, in harmony with the rectilinearity of the balancing graphite and light areas as well as with the dull-metallic sheen of the graphite itself.[3]

The drawings are imaginative projections of what the sculptures will look like, and, as with the drawings of other abstract sculptors, part of the fascination is in their non-figurative descriptiveness: they show what a purely abstract object will actually

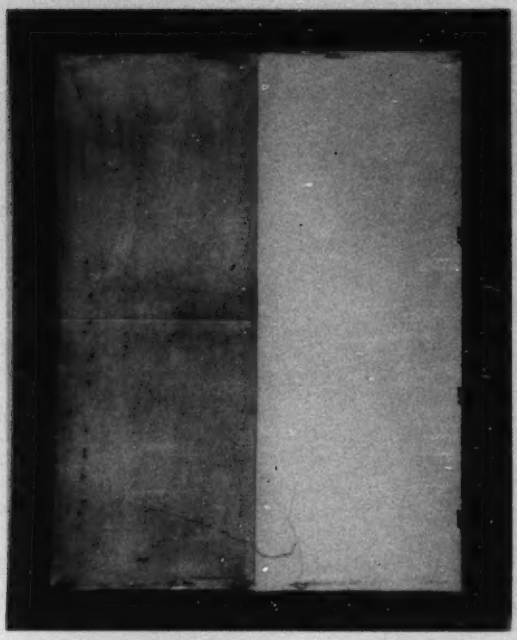
look like when it enters objective space. Yet the drawings are also rewardingly self-sufficient plastic constructions, uncompromisingly abstract compositions.

For the relation of the drawings to the sculptures, take as an example the graphite drawings, watercolor study, and realized sculpture all identified as *Clearing 5*. In the small drawing mounted together with the other eight *Clearings* we see that the panel is to be divided vertically in half and that there will be a tonal differentiation left and right — the left side being shiny dark graphite overlaying what in its exposed part is much lighter, only faintly rusty, right half. We also notice some darkly toned paper clinging around the staples on the right half, indicating that a layer of dark has actually been stripped away to reveal the light behind — just as, in the finished piece, the right half appears lighter because of a physical bend backward in the steel plate underneath the glass, admitting real light under its right-hand side.

From the independent drawing for the same piece, mounted on its own card, we learn still more. First, a horizontal supporting wire, represented by a black line, visibly bisects the left half of the composition. Secondly, the representation of the tonal differentiation between the left half — where the glass and steel are interfaced, extending together from the wall out to the central vertical fold in the steel — and the right half — where the glass continues out away from the wall while the steel returns to it — this differentiation is more subtly described. Now the paper ground to which the drawing is stapled is darkly drawn over, and the dusty light-toned paper that before was the light half of a light/dark opposition is now the dark half, the light represented by a clean white sheet, suggesting that what is materially light (the glass) will physically overlay what is materially dark (the steel).

The watercolor study for *Clearing 5* extends the same differentiation, although it can revert to a light ground because the colors will adequately carry a tonal distinction of greenish glass flush against dark steel *versus* glass diverging in space from steel. In fact, at the right-hand edge, and especially in the lower right-hand corner, the watercolor seems to become even spatially descriptive of two planes becoming angularly disjoined instead of flush.

Clearing for a Standing Man #5,
graphite and translucent paper
Collection Mrs. Ralph Greenlee, Dallas



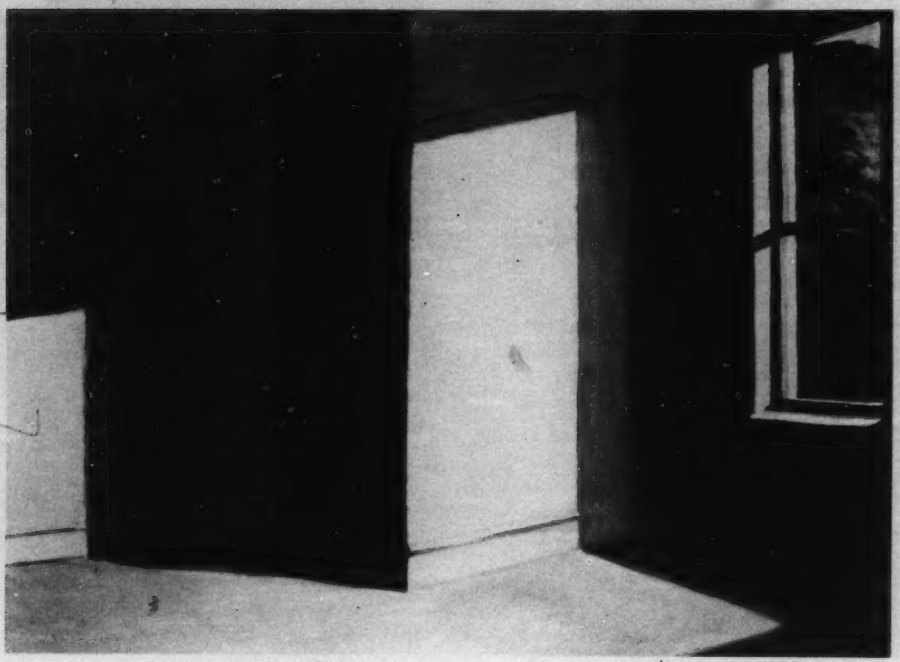
Thus far, in the drawings, the composition of *Clearing 5* may seem mainly a matter of surface design. But in the final sculpture *Clearing 5* comes fully into its own. Despite the monumental discrepancy between a vast planar expanse of glass and the shallowness of its displacement from the wall by the folded steel (*clearing* the wall by seven inches), we are obviously not confronted by a frontal plane like that of a painting. We see a pocket of light, a well or crevasse where light seeps between planes, rendering them all the more solid and substantial. Ironically, when the design is realized as sculpture, the possibility of a pictorial effect does intervene: the work may be seen to consist of two parts, one linear (the rectangle subdivided and inflected by the wire) and the other tonal. Even that effect, however, is subsumed into sculpture by the frank concreteness of the wire as it extends beyond the rectangle to tie around a supporting peg in the wall, as well as by the protrusion of the right half of the glass plate with the physicality of a door ajar or of an aircraft aileron. True, on the right the wire dissolves into a hazy *sfumato* under the etched glass; yet we are aware all along that this is not a pictorial illusion, which is confirmed by the reappearance of the wire where it hooks up to the peg at the right. Although the *Nine Clearings* do have certain features in common with developments in contemporary painting, they are not sculptural versions of painting ideas.

An index of their independence from painting is that even in their wall-bound shallowness (more extreme than in Wilmarth's earlier work) the nine reliefs have an assertive architectural character. The wall is implicated as an integral support: the sculptures are only intact hanging from it, even as they also rest on the floor. But if the pieces structurally depend upon the wall, they avoid assuming a subserviently ornamental relation to it. Even Matisse's four great bronze *Backs* (1909-29[?]; Museum of Modern Art), with the last and most abstract of which (1929[?]) Wilmarth's *Clearings* can be compared — for their vertical spinal folds as well as their spatial shifts along a horizontal axis — are more plaque-like than these. Also, the *Clearings* are architectural in their intrinsic materials — steel and glass and wire rope — as well as in the constructivistic approach which both formally

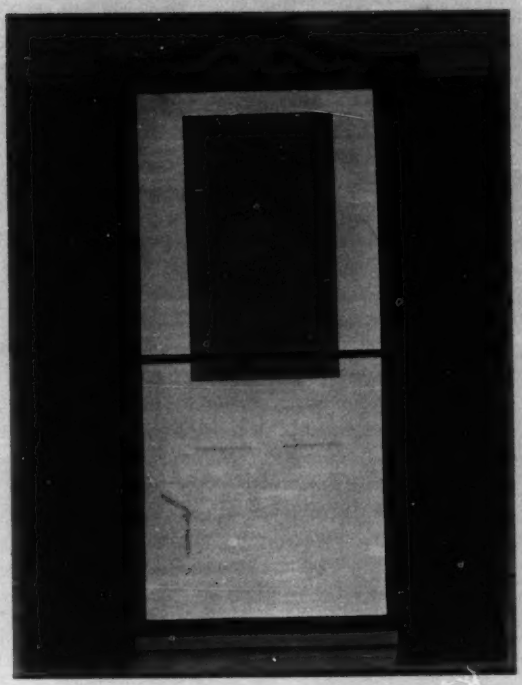
Clearing for a Standing Man #5

Henri Matisse, *The Back, IV*, 1929(?)
The Museum of Modern Art,
Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund

Edward Hopper, *Sun in an Empty Room*, 1963
Courtesy Kennedy Galleries, Inc.



Georgia O'Keeffe, *Lake George Window*, 1929
The Museum of Modern Art,
acquired through The Richard D. Brixey Bequest



composes and literally binds these together. No wonder they may historically suggest the Constructivist tradition that subsumed painting, sculpture, and architecture under a unified rubric of geometric forms.

Wilmarth's use of wire as line implicates early modern sculpture. Duchamp used real lead wire to "outline" lead foil in the representational but abstracted *Glider Containing Water Mill (in Neighboring Metals)* of 1913-15, his most constructivistic work. Calder and Picasso used wire as a literalized descriptive line in figurative sculptures of the 1920's. More significantly, Vladimir Tatlin's 1915-16 sheet-metal constructions share with Wilmarth's sculptures an abstract concreteness that relates to architecture: his *Corner Relief* (1915) was suspended from the corner of a room by wires and visible nails. Tatlin himself said that he wanted to use "Real materials in real space,"[4] which might also extend to Wilmarth's involvement with the physical properties — mass, translucency, even tensile strength — of his materials. Another Constructivist, Naum Gabo, stressed that "... It would be a false use of glass if the sculptor neglected the essential property of this material, namely, its transparency."[5] That not only suggests Wilmarth's active, manipulative attitude toward the transparency of his glass plates, but his 1970 sculpture *Normal Corner*. (a right angle of glass, one face resting on the floor, with a third glass plane forming a right-triangular prism in the corner, the whole held together with wire) even recalls Gabo's "stereo-metrical" illustration of the importance of space for sculpture by means of an open cube with diagonal vanes within.[6]

American art around the time of Constructivism shared in the European taste for geometrically simplified and often highly rectilinear construction, although usually without eliminating pictorial description. A notion of formally *abstracting from* visible reality was encouraged by Alfred Stieglitz in this country. If American art did not quickly join the mainstream of European abstraction, it did show, especially in the work of precisionists like Sheeler and Ralston Crawford, a distinct preference for just the kind of subject matter in which the more immediately architectural side of European modernism could be replicated — motifs on the order

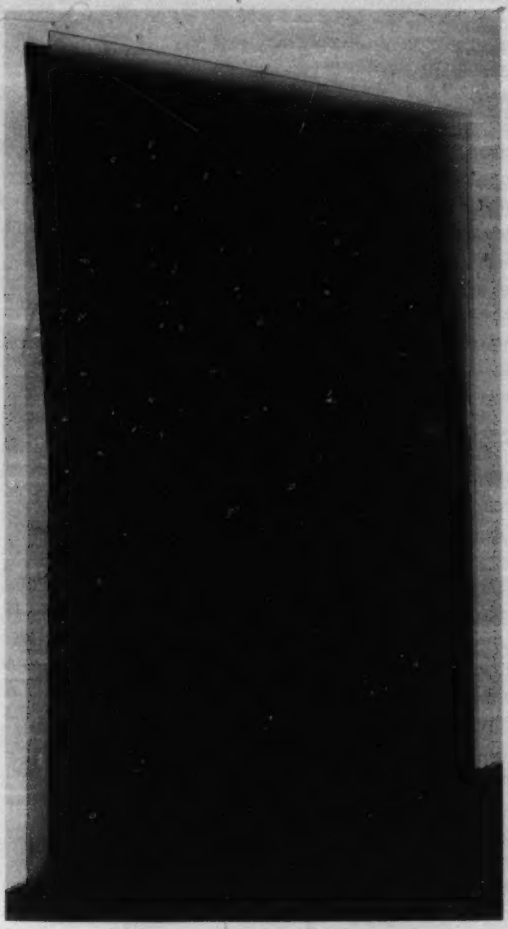
of plain barn and factory facades and efficient-looking industrial equipment. Photography played an important part in this process of geometricizing, iconographically filtering, and generally abstracting, the observable world, in a tradition extending from the photographs of Stieglitz, Steichen, Sheeler, and Paul Strand, through the painting of Georgia O'Keeffe, as well as the Precisionists, and on to the early Parisian work of Ellsworth Kelly, so different in its crispness from the abstract painting prevailing at home. Such art eventually proved a more lasting connection between geometric tendencies within American painting and European Constructivism than, for instance, the more modishly direct importations of the painter and collector A. E. Gallatin. Furthermore, the same tradition ultimately supplied a pedigree for post-War American modernism opposed to the subjectivity of Abstract Expressionism.

That, briefly, is why a painting like Georgia O'Keeffe's *Lake George Window* (1929; Museum of Modern Art) seems suggestive of Wilmarth. So too are certain paintings by Edward Hopper which share a similar concern for flat planes of light and proportion. The happy coincidence that O'Keeffe's hovering light blue oblong, crossed by the transom of a window and flanked by black shutters, resembles the mutedly luminous, atmospheric color of Wilmarth's oblong glasses only reinforces the fact that there is a more significant affinity in terms of shallow, hovering, overlapping, rectangular planes. Moreover, O'Keeffe's *Lake George Window*[7] anticipates Ellsworth Kelly's seminal relief painting *Window, Museum of Modern Art, Paris* (1949)[8] in its combination of architectural rendering and abstract geometry.

Kelly, in turn (whose own abstractions of 1950-51 based on broken shadows themselves derive from photographs that seem influenced by Paul Strand), has importance for Wilmarth partly in his paintings that become reliefs by the slight projection of one stretched canvas beyond the face of an abutting one. Also, as tangible lines stretched across palpably thick planes, Wilmarth's wire ropes recall reliefs of wood and string made by Kelly in Paris in 1949-50. Thus in Kelly's *Gate Board* (1950)[9] the overall rectangular ground is painted wood, while all the formal inflections of the surface are material: exposed, evenly spaced, drilled holes, through some of which string is threaded into an asymmetrical but regular pattern of parallel lines. Wilmarth is less involved with creating a linear pattern that can still be accommodated within the realm of painting, and more interested in allowing an essentially structural tie to exhibit truly linear (if not primarily formal) properties. Nevertheless, Kelly's string reliefs are closer to sculpture than the same artist's bi-planar canvas reliefs and remain a significant antecedent.

Wilmarth came to New York from California to study at The Cooper Union as a young man. While he has been a New York artist ever since, one naturally wonders whether his work has West-Coast features. However, even when a formal similarity can be found it is striking that Wilmarth's sensitivity toward surfaces distinguishes his work from comparable material. California sculpture in the 1960s was preoccupied with a calculatedly pristine smoothness of finish — a surface handling sharing in the anonymity and neutrality of Minimalism and yet having an elusively Pop, Simonized spiffiness.[10]

Conversely, when New York Minimalism compares with Wilmarth — as in plexiglass and thin steel box forms by Don Judd — there is more evident surface in the still intrinsically planar materials. Wilmarth worked for some time as an assistant to Tony Smith, from whom he could have gained a sense of the sculptural plane as, more than the facet of an idealized prism, a thin slice of substantial material whose edges are real. This is much less a question of whether the actual cutting and forming and assembling of steel or glass is done by hand (even if by the artist) or by machine (even if done by somebody else) than of a distinction drawn by David Pye between "workmanship of certainty" and "workmanship of risk."[11] The sheet metal and plywood common to Minimalism are replaced in Wilmarth's sculpture by glass and steel — plate materials that are obviously more difficult to modify with precision, just as etching glass is riskier than painting wood. From another point of view, this means that Wilmarth's closely pressed planes of heavy construction material relate more profoundly to the sandwiched, slipping, overlapping steel plates of David Smith's *Becca* (1965; Metropolitan Museum) than a superficial comparison of his etched glass surfaces with Smith's scratch-buffed *Cubi* would suggest.



Until around 1971 the wires that hold Wilmarth's glass sculptures together played a more or less secondary role. Often where the wire snapped against the etched glass face it made a graphic blot that stressed its own tension in a manner so close to painting as to evoke the "zips" of Barnett Newman. The wire was prominent in works of 1970, but it retained formal subservience and seems, at the same time, to have carried the conceptualistic implication of a "bracket" for logically grouping elements or defining categories. *Tarp* (formerly called *Hung Hung*), a glass and wire piece from 1971, indicates a radical re-examination of the relation between the glass and its wire support that relates to advanced developments in New York sculpture. In *Tarp* an arc composed of bent sheets of glass is suspended from wires hanging from nails visibly driven into the wall. The wires themselves are stretched from nail to nail by the weight of the glass and form two squares, in purely geometric opposition to the segmental form of the glass equally visible with it as both edge and material. An analogy is established that depends upon a new equality of wire with glass, an analogy between two whole squares composed of literal "line" and an incomplete circle segment that is only linear when seen edge-wise.[12]

As a work of art the *Nine Clearings for a Standing Man* is accomplished enough to demand more than exclusively formal attention. True, a good work of art automatically relates to the rest of life as a good act that endures in time, and that is in itself rewarding. Specifically artistic relations between Wilmarth's sculptures and important contemporary art, from the Stella of the late 1960s[13] to the emphasis on uninflected planes of concrete materials and on dimensionally determined form in the work of younger artists today, certainly do exist. The trouble is that while criticism busies itself establishing a purely artistic context for the work of art as a formal construction, others may indulge in such sweeping, unargued claims as that Wilmarth's sculpture is "apolitical"[14] — as though that were a cheerful, worthwhile thing to be.

What exactly are nine "clearings" for a standing man? A clearing may be a *clarification*, which suggests increasing transparency or lucidity — as Wilmarth's glass becomes more translucent as it diverges from

the steel. A clearing may also be a space allowed for some potential movement, as a *clearance*, or the space generated by an actual movement, as in *clearing* something away, or the space defined by an independent movement away from something, as when we say that the steel *clears* the wall. Clearance, in turn, suggests leeway, liberty of passage, permitted movement. Even a clearing in the woods is a space created by removing something for the benefit of something else. All senses of "clearing" imply movement and liberty.

Where is the "standing man"? In the most generalized way the human form is implied in the upright, standing position and bodily proportions of each of the *Nine Clearings*, in their division into distinct left and right halves separately disposed, and in their tense, muscular pinning (as if by the tendons of arms) against the wall. To look from one to the next is even to sense a kind of eurhythmic body posturing, as in Degas' sculptures of dancers.

Are we really straining to invoke the presence here of a man's body that is in fact missing? Is this little more than a wish, after centuries during which almost all sculpture dealt preeminently with the human form, to somehow read the body into a non-representational work of art? Not exactly. The very universality of the human form has always meant that the office of sculpture lies not in the redundant conjuring up of the body so much as the formal, space-embracing, and imaginative qualities with which the body can be informed. Otherwise, one image of a man is as good as any other.

Secondly, the vision of the body that descends to us from the Renaissance has moral and political qualifications that are no longer desirable. The presumptuous, elitist individualism of Renaissance Humanism was the artistic expression of a worldview that has deservedly lost its justification. Now idealized individuals — whether famous princes or anonymous models of beauty — look to us to be false, guarded, or even insidiously devised, while, on the other extreme, even naturalistic replicas of unique individuals imply condescension and a disarmed particularity. For Rodin the natural seemed an antidote for the ideal; but we want the *real*, and in searching for it we discard substitutes and compensations. The body has not been purged from sculpture; instead illusionism has withered away.

Curiously, a number of advanced artists find themselves dealing with abstract systems that once served as supports for the Renaissance idea of the body, now minus the human image.[15] To see such developments as an impoverishment of the subject matter of art — as though now something were missing — is to overlook the way in which the conviction of the Renaissance ideal itself depended more on flattery than resemblance, including the appeal to the spectator's empathetic feelings. To make art directly out of real materials and real processes in the real world is more thoroughly human anyway. The human form is only missing from the *Nine Clearings for a Standing Man* when no one is observing them; otherwise, this beautiful array of sculptures confronts us all eye to eye.

1
That the *Nine Clearings* are girdled tautly against the flat wall by single bisecting cables running their full width may suggest, for instance, such modern "cable-stayed" bridges in Germany as the Norderelbe Bridge at Hamburg (1962), whose strong, slender central rib in turn recalls a kind of long, shallow, bow-like bracing with cables in Constructivist architecture of the 1920s.

2
John A. Roebling, "Manufacture of Wire Ropes," reprinted from *American Railroad Journal and Mechanics' Magazine* (1843) in Samuel Rapport and Helen Wright, eds., *Engineering* (The New York University Library of Science) (New York, 1963), pp. 157-62. Roebling's specific innovation consisted in not twisting the wire fibers as they were laid about a common axis (twisting had weakened all earlier cables), and in holding all the wires in tension as the cable was made.

3
Joseph Masheck, "Chris Wilmarth" (review), *Artforum*, XII/9 (May 1974), pp. 65-66.

4
Quoted in Camilla Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art 1863-1922* (New York, 1970), p. 180.

5
N. Gabo, "Sculpture: Carving and Construction in Space," in J. L. Martin, Ben Nicholson, and N. Gabo, eds., *Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art* (London, 1937), pp. 103-11. The idea relates to the doctrine of truth-to-materials in architecture, Wright's writings on which date mostly from 1928.

6
Illus., *ibid.*, p. 103, fig. 1, no. ii.

7
A window of exactly the same sort appears, at an angle, in Steiglitz' photograph *Grape Leaves and Porch, Lake George* (1934); illus., Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer* (New York, 1973), pl. lvii.

8
Illus., John Coplans, *Ellsworth Kelly* (New York, n.d.), pl. 8 on p. 27; Kelly's own photograph of the motif appears as pl. 7 on the same page.

9
Illus., *ibid.*, pl. 54.

10
What is often called the "finish fetish" in California art might not have developed as it did apart from the architecture of Richard Neutra, whose houses are described by Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric: An Architectural Aesthetic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), p. 26, as "so polished, so perfect, as to seem impossible to achieve: as if their builders all wore white gloves and tabi and had their bath-house hut erected as the first building on site in the Japanese manner: as if their owners never had an unpresentable moment or laid down a pair of sun glasses." Neutra himself suggested that extreme precision of craftsmanship has to do with social power when he described a Chinese emperor sending for a famous craftsman "to produce a lacquer bowl with twenty coats, smoothly ground." He noted that modern mechanical precision was developed in the munitions industry. See Richard Neutra, *Survival Through Design* (New York, 1954), pp. 74-75.

11
David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (Cambridge, 1968), for my review of which see "Aesthetics of the Artisan," *Studio International*, CLXXVI/902 (July-August 1968), pp. 56-57.

12
The motif of literal line in recent sculpture deserves further study. Mel Bochner's wall piece *Degrees: Straight Line* (1968) is a significant example dealing with the dual mathematical and tangible reality of a linear theme borrowed directly from geometry: there a "real" twine line stretches between two nails driven into the wall; a semi-circular arc is inscribed over the cord, from nail to nail, bearing the legend "180°" (a straight line is an "angle" of 180°).

13
I have specifically discussed *Slip* (1972), one of Wilmarth's best pieces, in relation to Stella, in a review: "Chris Wilmarth," *Artforum*, X/10 (June 1972), p. 81.

14
Alexandra Anderson, "Christopher Wilmarth: Portfolio," *The Paris Review*, XV/58 (Summer 1974), p. 102, with pls. following.

15
Robert Mangold, for one, paints configurations which resemble variations on diagrams used to generate the proportions of an ideal human figure in the Renaissance (and to validate Humanist ideals), as well as abstract architectural motifs from the same tradition. See my essay "Robert Mangold: A Humanist Geometry," *Artforum*, XII/6 (March 1974), pp. 39-43.

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Wasserman, Emily. "First Show at the Graham Gallery", *Artforum*, vol. VII, no. 5, January 1969, pp. 59-60.

Biography

Born:
Sonoma, California, 1943
Education:
Cooper Union, 1960-62, 1963-65
Teaching Positions:
Professor of Sculpture, Cooper Union, 1969-present
Visiting Artist, Yale University, 1971-72

Awards:
1969 National Endowment for the Arts Grant
1970 Guggenheim Fellowship
1972 Norman Wait Harris Award, The Art Institute of Chicago, Howard Foundation Fellowship
1974 Awarded Commission for City University of New York, Mathematics Building, Mural Competition

One-Man Exhibitions:
1968 Graham Gallery, New York
1971 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
1971 Janie C. Lee Gallery, Dallas
1972 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
1973 Galleria dell'Ariete, Milan
1974 Rosa Esman Gallery, New York
1974 Daniel Weinberg Gallery, San Francisco

Group Exhibitions:
1966 Park Place Gallery, New York
1966 Sculpture Annual, Whitney Museum, New York
1967 Graham Gallery, New York
1968 Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut
1968 Graham Gallery, New York (large drawings)
1968 Sculpture Annual, Whitney Museum, New York
1969 Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut
1969 Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey
1969 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York (drawing show)
1969 Jewish Museum, New York (multiples exhibition)
1970 French & Co., New York (drawings)
1970 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
1970 L'Art Vivant Aux Etats Unis, Foundation Maeght, France (Dore Ashton, Curator)
1970 Janie C. Lee Gallery, Dallas
1970 Sculpture Annual, Whitney Museum, New York
1971 Windham College, Putney, Vermont
1971 "Twenty-Six by Twenty-Six", Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, New York
1971 "Highlights of the Season", Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut
1971 "Drawings by New York Arstists", University of Utah
1971 "Recent Acquisitions", Museum of Modern Art
1972 Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York
1972 Indianapolis Museum of Art
1972 The Art Institute of Chicago
1973 Sculpture and Painting Biennial, Whitney Museum, New York
1973 The Albert Pilavin Collection, Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, Providence
1973 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
1973 Marconi Gallery, Milan, Italy
1973 Basel Art Fair, Basel, Switzerland
1974 Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville
1974 Indianapolis Museum of Art

Museum and Foundation Collections:
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
The Art Institute of Chicago
The Philadelphia Museum of Art
The Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art
The Lannon Foundation
The Woodward Foundation
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Fogg Art Museum
The Wichita Art Museum

Works Exhibited

Sculptures:

Clearing #1, 1973, glass and steel, 60 x 80 x 4 inches

Clearing #2, 1973, glass and steel, 60 x 80 x 4⅜ inches

Clearing #3, 1973, glass and steel, 60 x 80 x 4 inches

Clearing #4, 1973, glass and steel, 60 x 80 x 5 inches

Clearing #5, 1973, glass and steel, 60 x 80 x 6¾ inches

Clearing #6, 1973, glass and steel, 60 x 80 x 4¾ inches

Clearing #7, 1973, glass and steel, 60 x 80 x 4 inches

Clearing #8, 1973, glass and steel, 60 x 80 x 3½ inches, lent by Henry Geldzahler, New York

Clearing #9, 1973, glass and steel, 60 x 80 x 6¾ inches, lent by Dr. and Mrs. Edward Okun, St. Louis

Drawings:

Nine Clearings for a Standing Man, 1973, graphite and translucent paper, 30½ x 22½ inches

Nine Clearings for a Standing Man, 1973, pen and ink, 11 x 14 inches

Watercolors:

Clearing #1, 1973, watercolor, 11 x 13⅜ inches

Clearing #2, 1973, watercolor, 11 x 13⅜ inches

Clearing #3, 1973, watercolor, 11 x 13⅜ inches

Clearing #4, 1973, watercolor, 11 x 13⅜ inches

Clearing #5, 1973, watercolor, 11 x 13⅜ inches

Clearing #6, 1973, watercolor, 11 x 13⅜ inches

Clearing #7, 1973, watercolor, 11 x 13⅜ inches

Clearing #8, 1973, watercolor, 11 x 13⅜ inches

Clearing #9, 1973, watercolor, 11 x 13⅜ inches

Light gains character as it touches the world; from what is lighted and who is there to see. I associate the significant moments of my life with the character of the light at the time. The universal implications of my original experience have located in and become signified by kinds of light. My sculptures are places to generate this experience compressed into light and shadow and return them to the world as a physical poem.

Art exists for a reason. The reason is simple and often forgotten. Art is man's attempt to communicate an understanding of life to man. To give in a sculpture what I understand; to imbue concrete things with parallels to human feelings; to do this in a real way; to be believable is my purpose.

In my attempt to make believable art I make sculptures in which the forms seem to have evolved of themselves. They exist and imply change. The personality of the piece is self-generated and not imposed in an illustrative way. It is not narrated. In their autonomy my sculptures are real. Certain formal limitations support this sense of self generation. The sculpture is given a first form which is finite. The finite is established by cutting the basic shape of the material with no sense of touch. The material is flat and the shapes are geometric. The memory of the first form is retained in the completed piece giving the sculpture a history. All subsequent working of the material is done with respect to the identity of the material, its first form, and to celebrate touch.

For years I have been concerned with the complex problem of implying the human presence in a non-objective art. The concept of the self-generated form approaches a solution in that the sculpture attains a living presence. The layering of material has organic implications but it was the feeling of people in places and the special energy certain places have long after the people have gone that provided insight into my concern with the figure. The configuration, scale and proportion of place can evoke human presence. These are the places I speak of when I say my sculptures are places to generate experience. The feeling is intimate. You are acknowledged.

Christopher Wilmarth
September, 1974

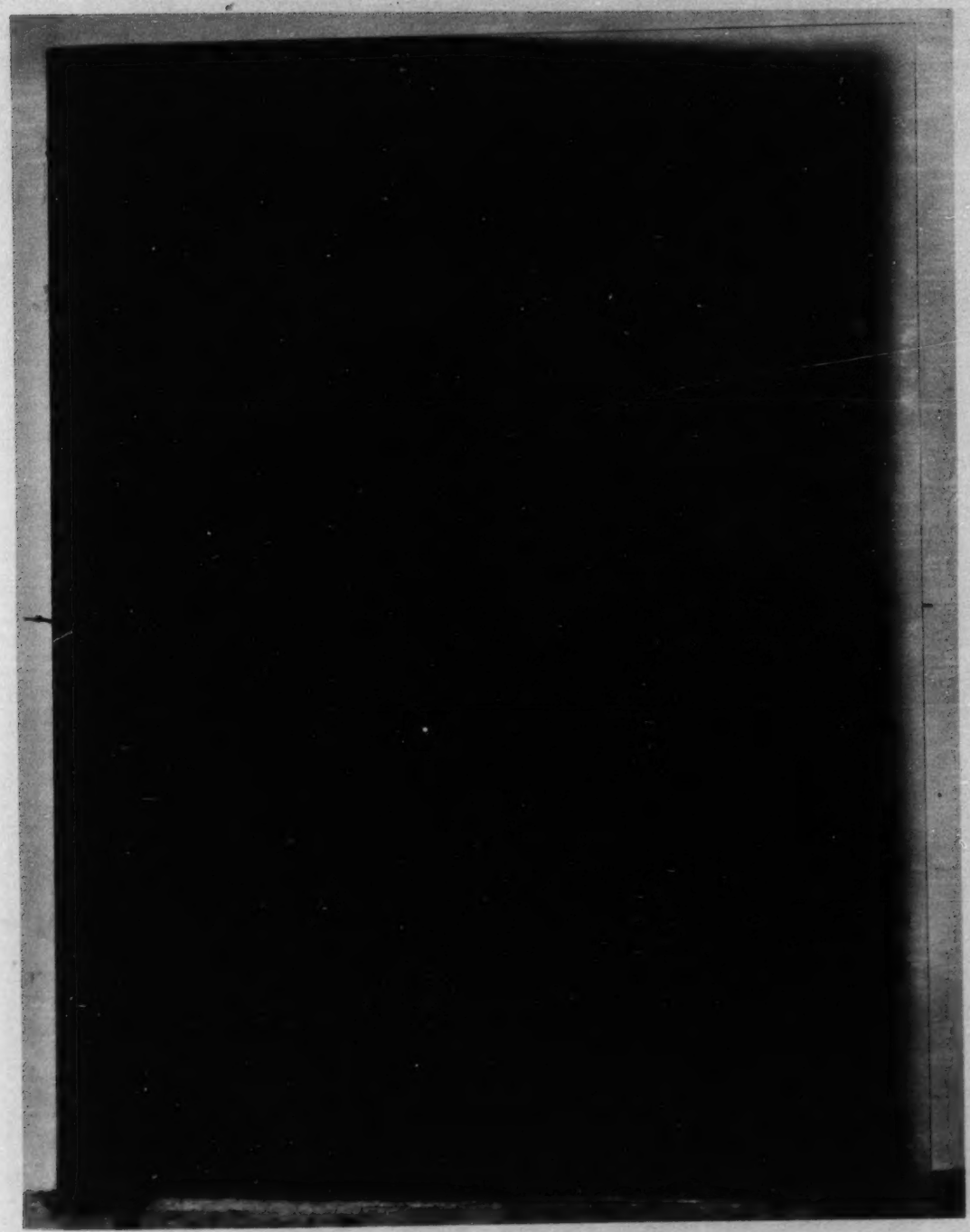
Clearing for a Standing Man #1

Clearing for a Standing Man #2

Clearing for a Standing Man #3

Clearing for a Standing Man #4

Clearing for a Standing Man #5



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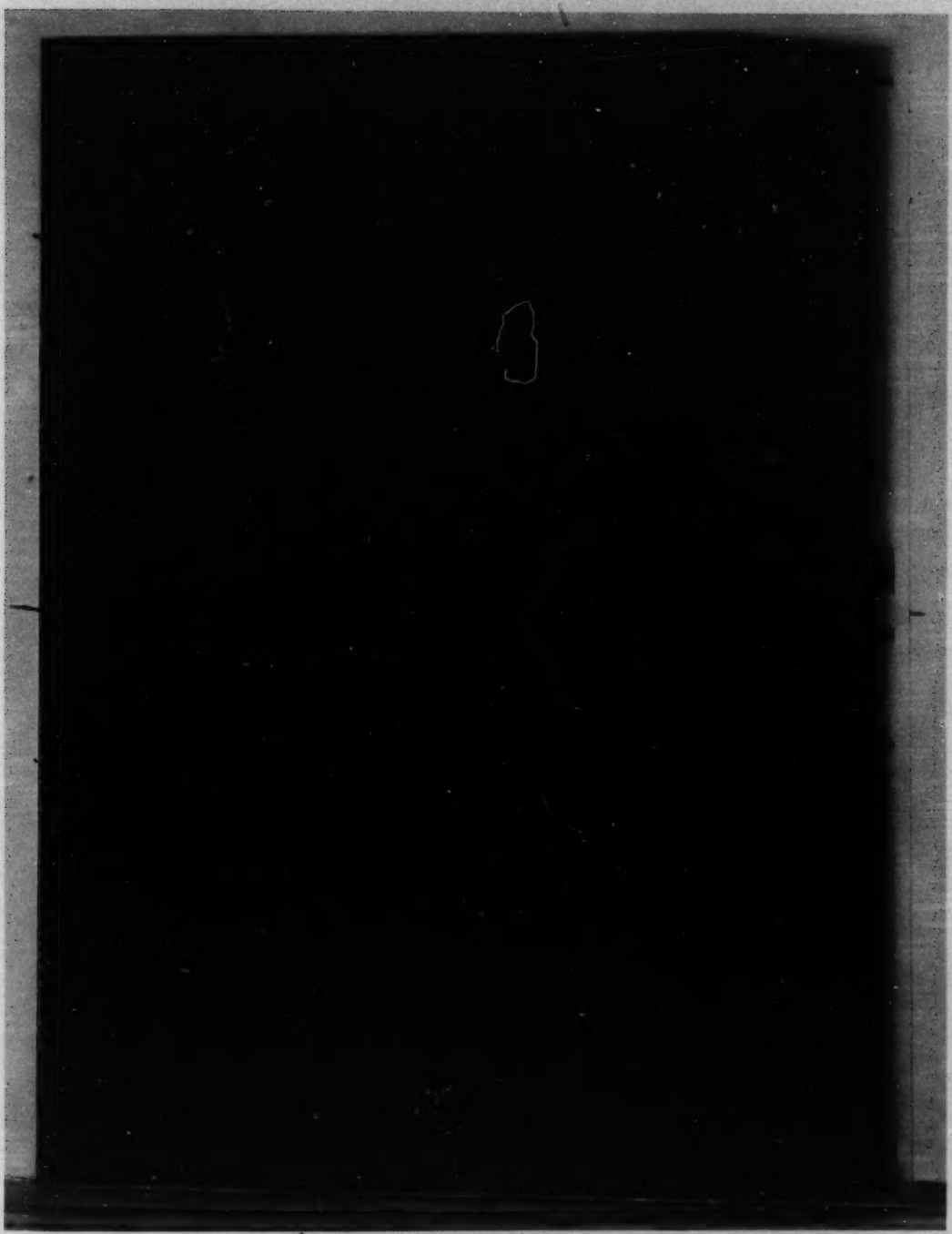

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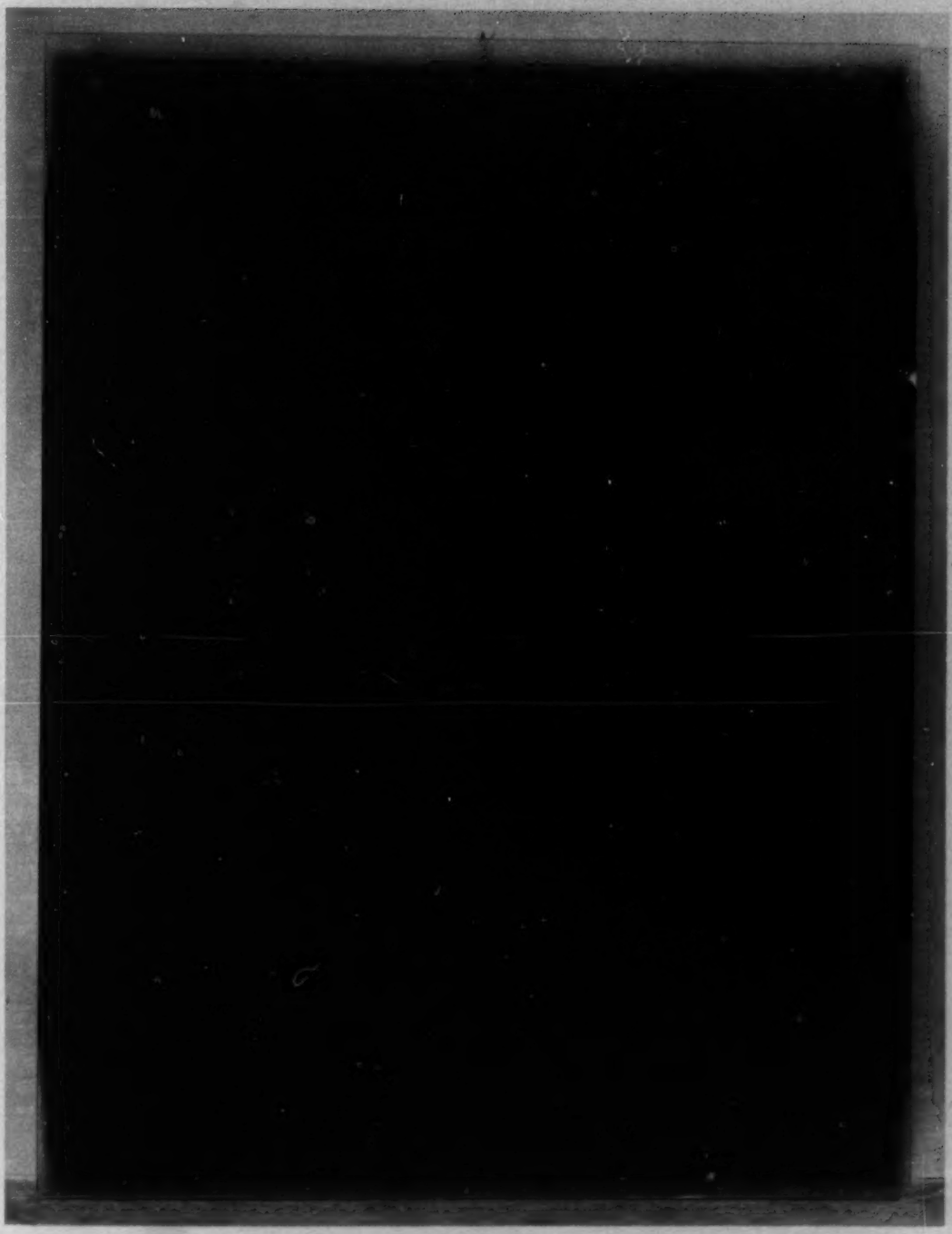

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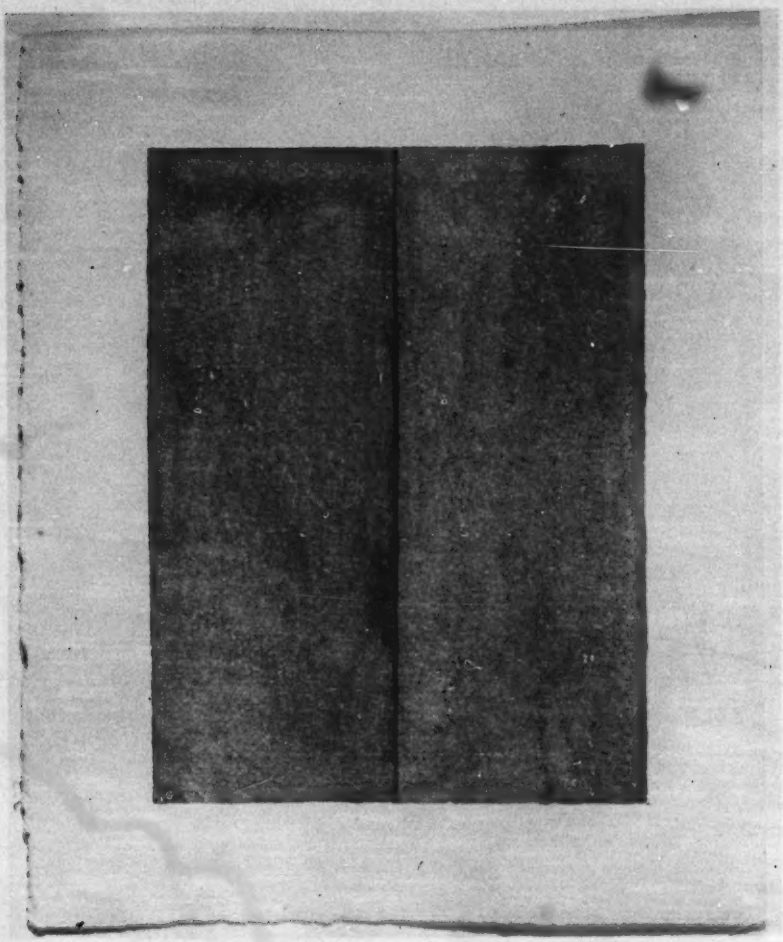
Clearing for a Standing Man #9

Clearing for a Standing Man #1



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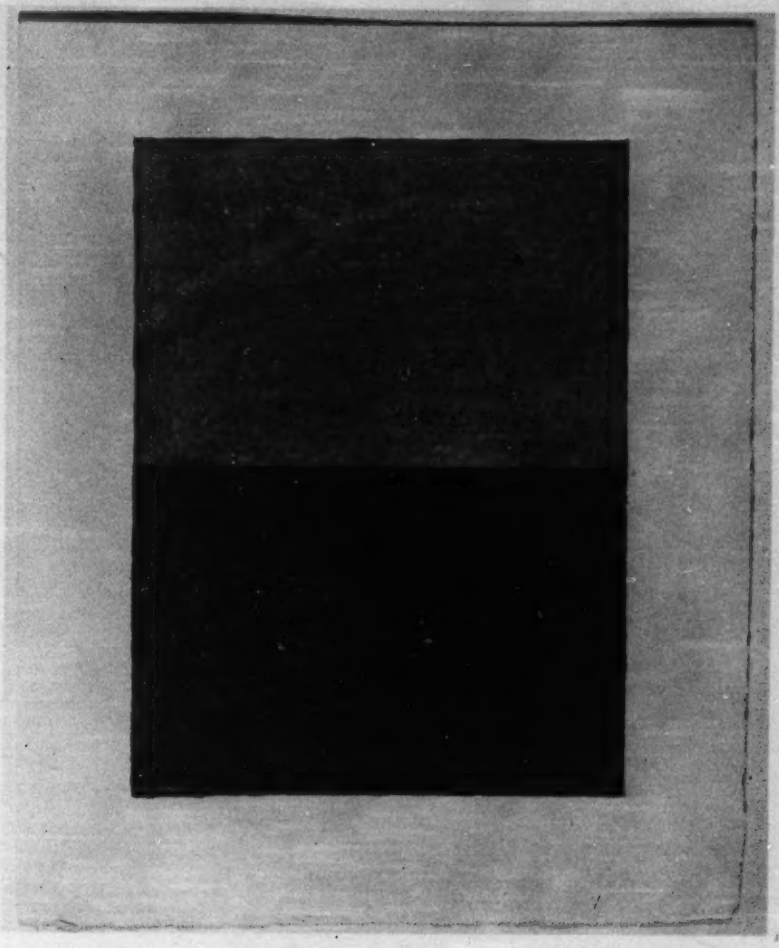

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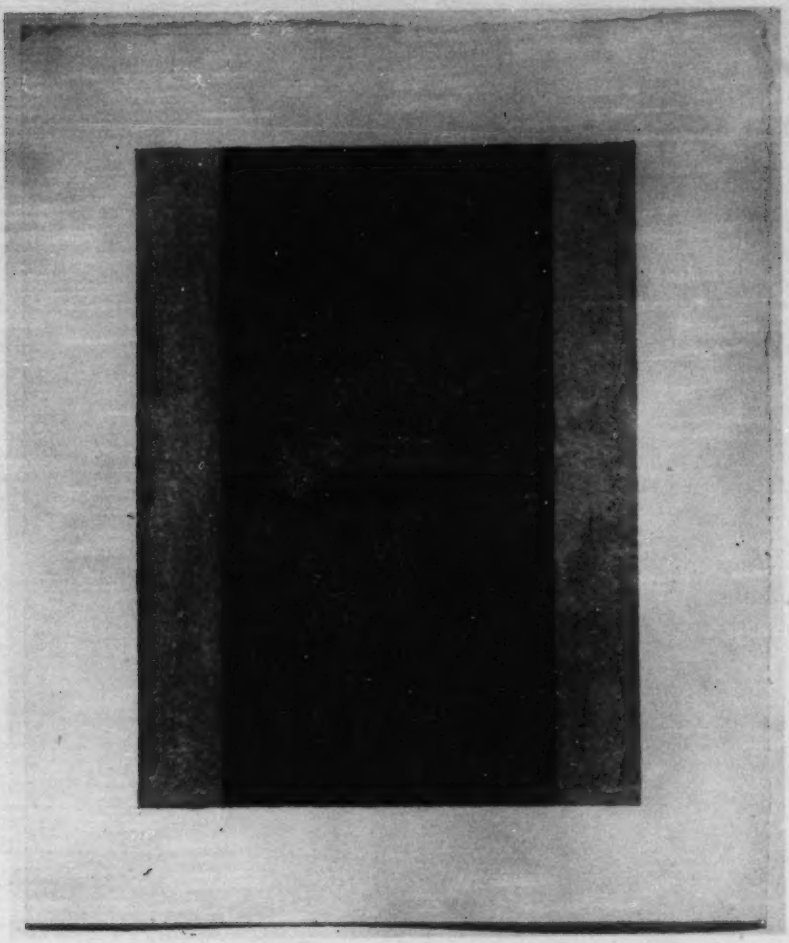

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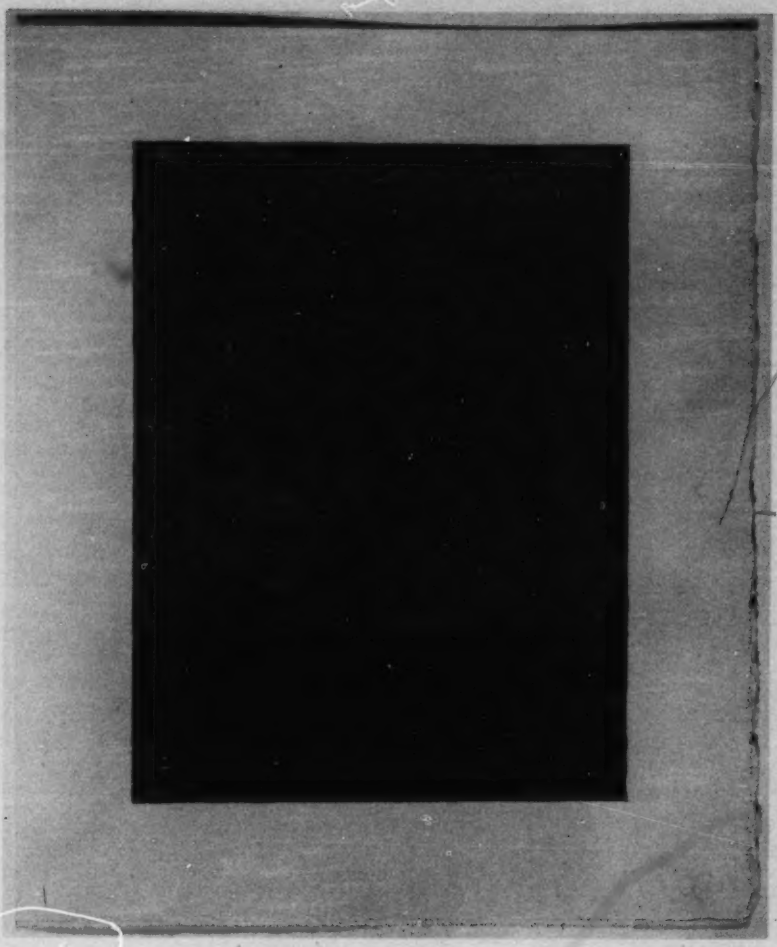

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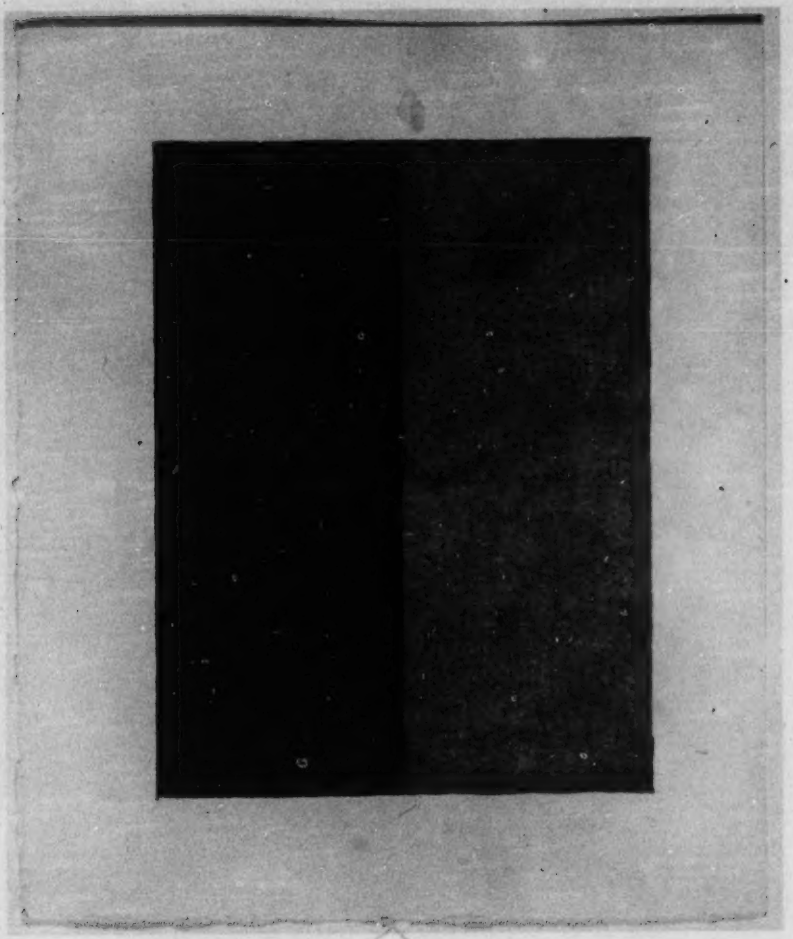

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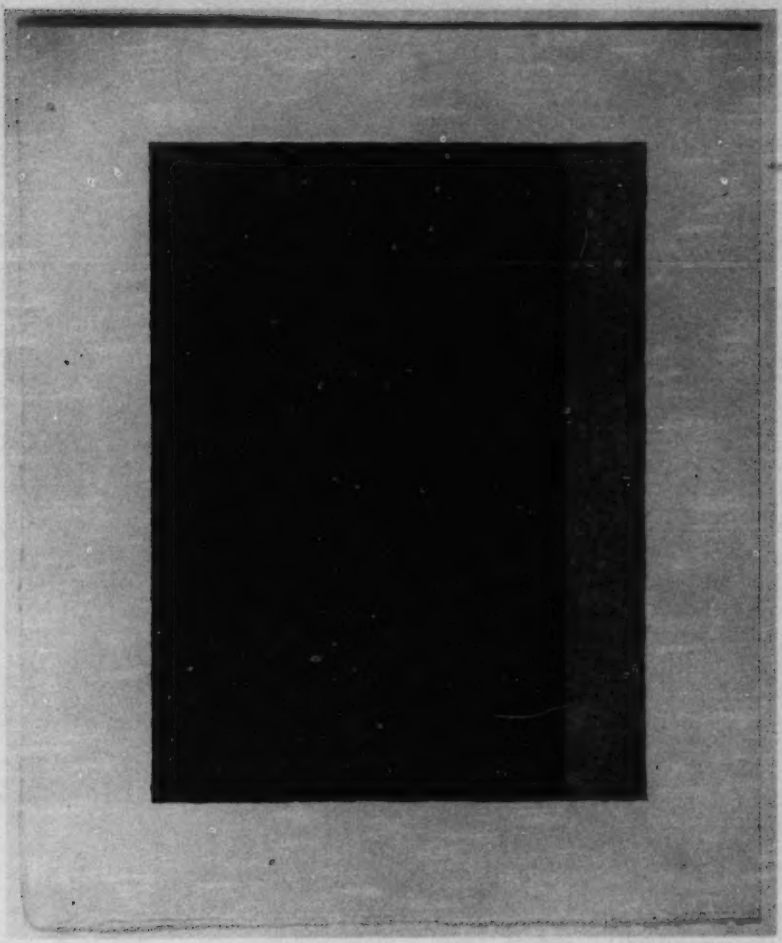

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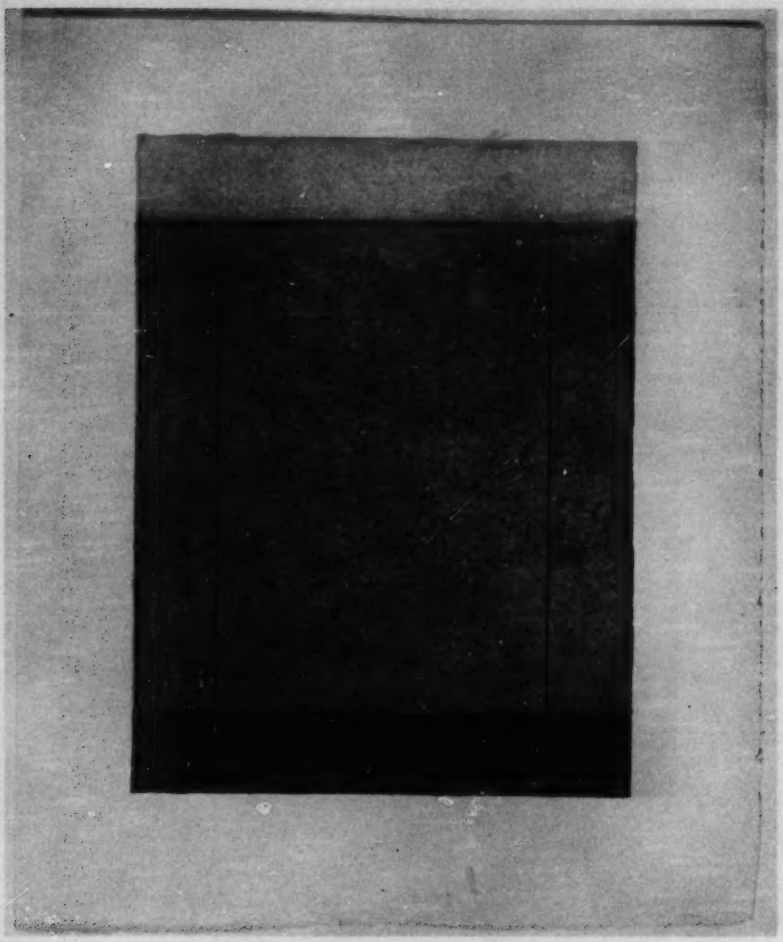

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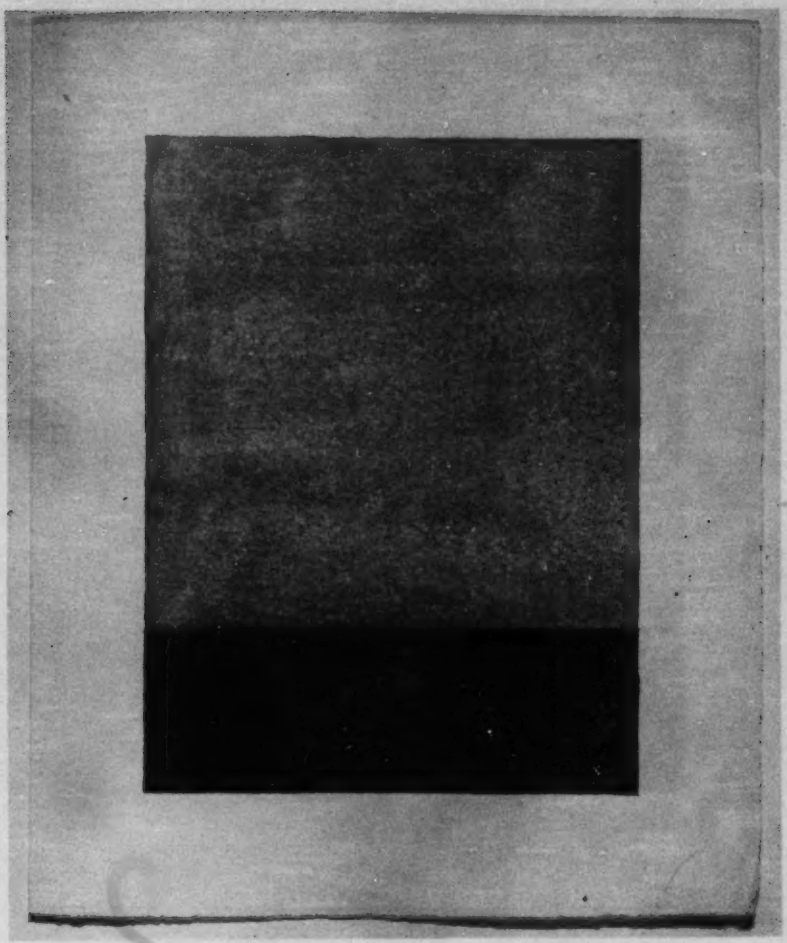

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